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ABSTRACT

A project was conducted at the Adult Learning Center in Erie, Pennsylvania, to help clients who had recently failed (and almost passed) the General Educational Development (GED) examination to reapply themselves to specific curriculum materials, correct deficiencies, and retake the GED test. Intense guidance was provided to each student in the program. The program included: (1) maintaining daily contact with each student to provide encouragement and positive motivation in their preparation; (2) counseling that included requiring each student to write their long- and short-term career goals; (3) encouraging students to apply to programs to further their education after the GED; and (4) group instruction in test taking. Classes were held from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The program was built around programmed disposable materials, along with some audiovisual materials. Forty-two students enrolled in the program, 20 retested, and 11 actually achieved their GEDs. Attendance was a problem for many students, and their low level of attendance could not be overcome by staff even with intensive contact. The study concluded that high numbers of prospective students must be contacted in order to recruit and retain the number of students projected in project goals for this population. (KC)

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GED INTENSIVE STUDY GUIDE

A

353 Special Project Report

Sept. 1, 1989 to June 30, 1990

Funded by

The Pennsylvania Department of Education
Division of Adult Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

to

The School District of the City of Erie, PA
Adult Educational Learning Center
3325 Cherry Street
Erie, PA 16508

Mr. Joseph Rodriquez - Superintendent of Schools
Mr. Daniel G. Tempestini - Director of Vocational/Adult Education

Project # 98-0008

Budget Total $9,182.00 Federal Funds

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ABSTRACT

Those who work in adult education must be aware of the many components that are common to all public adult education programs. This Special 353 Project seeks to identify one group of clients which are common to all G.E.D. programs; those student's who don't quite make it. By combining intensive study and intensive guidance to these marginal students it is felt that they would succeed where before most gave up. It is those who work in public funded, voluntary, open-ended G.E.D. programs who may find this report of value.

INTRODUCTION

Possibly the most difficult aspect of public adult education is student recruitment and retention. Each Adult Learning Center has its share of drop outs and drop ins. However, there is another type of drop out that has not really been addressed. What happens to students after they take the G.E.D. examination? What about those clients who fail the exam and specifically what about those who just don't quite make it?

It is hoped that those students who pass the exam avail themselves of all the opportunities a high school diploma makes possible. It is the group of "high-end" failures that I began to notice appearing in the monthly unofficial test scores. While x number of students were failing, Y number were within ten (10) points of passing. I felt that by targeting this group for special consideration (intensive study) they could be re-recruited, coached in their lowest subject areas, motivated through ongoing guidance, pre-tested, and then retested with a high probability of passing.

It is within this frame work that I reasoned a target population to be addressed that would also address Priority three of the Special 353 Project guidelines. I felt that a pilot program would address the feasability of addressing this specific group within the resources available through Special 353 Project funding.

The G.E.D. Intensive Study Guide was run from August 27, 1989 until June 31, 1990.

The staff involved with G.E.D. Intensive Study Guide included Ms. Suzanne Jarrett (guidance counselor) and Mr. Gary Narbut (instructor). However, the entire staff of the Adult Learning Center provided much input into the curriculum used and advice on relevent subject materials.

It is hoped that this report/evaluation will prove useful to A.B.E./G.E.D. instructors and administrators involved with a large student enrollment with a relatively large weekly/monthly G.E.D. testing program.

Copies of the GEDISG will be forwarded to:

1) The Pennsylvania Department of Education
   Division of Adult Education
   333 Market Street
   Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

2) Advance
   Division of Adult Education
   333 Market Street
   Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

DISTRIBUTION OF FINDINGS

The staff involved in the project have maintained contact with the Division of Adult Basic Education in the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Other ABE/GED programs were contacted for input and concerns. These results, including the curriculum materials and the final report will be made available to all the ABE/GED programs throughout the Commonwealth. Project product will also be made available through the services of ADVANCE.

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROJECT DESIGN

OVERVIEW: This report will state the outcome of the project conducted at the Adult Learning Center, 3325 Cherry Street, Erie, Pennsylvania. This special project was designed to address Priority # 3 of the State 353 Grant priorities. This program was conducted to help clients reapply themselves to specific curriculum materials, correct deficencies, and retake the GED examination. A policy of intense guidance was provided to each student involved in the program.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the process of monitoring monthly test scores of our ABE/GED students, it was noticed that a certain number of students were achieving near passing scores. It was reasoned that if these students were immediately contacted and encouraged to intensely prepare for retaking the test they would have a very good chance of passing a re-examination. One of the problems we have noted over the years is that many of the people who fail the examination do not return to classes and are lost in the system.

III. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

One of the most difficult problems facing adult basic education is the high drop out rate. Many students enroll with the idea of earning a diploma yet disappear before fulfilling their goal. One group of students that may be targeted is those adults who have taken the GED test and failed yet achieved an overall score of at least 210+ points. Because of their nearness to passing it was felt that these students, with the proper coaching, would be able to retake and pass the examination. To address this problem, the Intensive Study Guide was developed.

Specific objectives of the program included:

1. Maintaining a daily contact with each student, as possible, to provide encouragement and positive motivation as regards to preparation for the GED examination and post GED behavior.

2. Inclusive in counseling, each student was required to articulate in writing their short and long term career goals. (approximately one page)

3. All students were encouraged to apply to post-GE vocational education programs, such as those sponsored by J.T.P.A. or the local Private Industry Council.

4. Address the specific problems involved with test taking and instruction. As all students involved were "high end failures" instruction, while geared for the individual, were provided in a group setting.

5. Enrolling at least 60 students.

6. Based on an enrollment of 60 students enable 45 students to retake and pass the GED examination.

7. Completing all required and requested reports for the 353 project.

8. Provide ADVANCE with an evaluation report of program retention and success.

PROCEDURE

The first step was to schedule classes. We felt that Tuesday and Thursday evenings, 6:30 to 9:30 PM, would allow us to serve the most students. Classes were to begin the first week of October, 1989.

The next step was to examine the unofficial test scores provided to the Adult Learning Center (ALC) by Children's Services of the Erie School District (test administers). We reasoned that we could go back to September of 1988 and call those students who failed the examination yet had achieved an overall score of at least 210 points. It was felt that this time frame would allow us to meet enrollment goals and reach students sufficiantly near to passing the GED. This also allowed us to access those students who failed but were not registered with the Adult Learning Center. All students who failed with at least a score of 210 points were contacted by direct mailing (78 students in the first mailing). This was followed up by telephone contact if possible.

The first mailing went out September 25, 1989. A total of 75 letters were posted. Response was immediate and six students were enrolled in the first classes.

As students were registered into the program, they were given an extensive guidance session explaining:

1. The need to attend as many classes as possible. Continuity is an important part of the program.

2. That class subject material would generally cover the two subject areas of the test the student scored lowest on. However,

retesting was not strictly limited to only two subject areas.

3. That contact with the guidance counselor would be a part of each class and that students would make an effort to contact the Adult Learning Center if they could not attend class. Also, the counselor would attempt to contact them if they failed to attend classes.

4. The nature of the teaching materials and methods to be used. Although each student was encouraged to work at their own speed, there would be stress placed on reviewing materials covered in class on a weekly basis.

5. Pre and post testing. Each student enrolled in the program takes the official GED practice test, form AA (OFFICIAL PRACTICE TEST). After the test is completed, scores are matched against their true GED scores and the student decides which areas of the test they will key on. When they have demonstrated improvement in their subject areas, they are retested with form BB of the official practice test (a score of 225+ will be required before students will be encouraged to retake the GED examination).

6. That they were chosen for the program on the basis of their unofficial GED test scores and that they are close to realizing their goal of graduating. Each student is encouraged to call the counselor for help with any problems which may arise that could affect their progress in school.

Classes were to begin the first week in October. However, because of a technicality, funding was not approved by the local school board until mid November. As students began responding to mail and telephone contacts, the program came to life.

As earlier noted, classes were held Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6:30 to 9:30 PM. This allowed for 6 hours each of instruction and guidance per week. Because of time alloted for individual study, time was available within the class frame work for program logistics. This allowed us to (a) contact present and possible clients and (b) track present student (s) progress as regards to retesting.

All students accepted into the GED Intensive Study Guide were enrolled into the general student population of the Adult Learning Center. All rules and regulations of the general student population were applicable to them. However, the GED Intensive Study Guide students worked in a seperate area.

CURRICULUM

In developing the curriculum the instructor drew upon the resources of staff of the ALC as well as ADVANCE and the PDE resource center. This included audio-visual as well as written materials.

The core of our program was built around programed disposable materials. This was done for two reasons. It was felt TO be cost effective, And, since students were working on or about the same grade and subject areas/levels it made some group instruction possible.

In conjunction with print materials, some audio/visual materials were used. All students involved with GEDISG viewed at least three vidio tapes covering different aspects of the content of the GED examination (see curriculum list). These tapes were presented weekly throughout the GEDISIG program.

What we attempted to create was a learning climate, coupled with intensive ongoing guidance service, conducive to allowing students involved in the program to build competency and confidence as regards the retesting process. In some ways we succeeded and in some ways we did not.

As students were accepted into the program, during the initial individual session, each was asked to write down their short and long term career goals. This was done to see if a post GED matching

could be made between a student and any vocational programs that might be available. This was part of the emphasis on goal orientation that is so important to (us) retaining students. Students were also made aware of other educational opportunities available on successful completion of the GED Examination.

The next step was to administer the Official GED Practice Test, Form AA. These scores were then matched against the student's unofficial GED test scores. Subject areas of concentration were then agreed on. This was done through identifying the two main areas where it was felt each student could make the most gain. For example, a low Social Studies score on the GED and a high Social Studies score on the official practice test seemed to suggest that by coaching in the content area of Social Studies points could be made up. Generally we advise that students work on the two subject areas where they scored lowest (in many cases this was Math and English).

After subject areas were ascertained, program materials were made available to each student. While most instruction was individual in nature, because of the common subject areas and grade levels, some form of class instruction was possible. This had two immediate positive results -- it allowed for reviewing materials covered in class and gave the students a sense of being part of a class rather than "going it alone".

Each students progress was plotted on an individual data card noting subject/assignments, all test scores, attendance, and contact

occurences, e,g. contact with the student to encourage attendance. The data of each card was constantly updated by both the instructor and guidance counselor. In some cases, but not all, a modified Monroe-Sherman diagnostic test was also given to students to plot their progress.

Attendance in the GEDISG was on a voluntary basis and as with our regular adult program open-ended. Students were encourage to attend as often as possible to add continuity to their studies. As many of the materials were self contained, students were realistically near achieving their goal. Classroom performance was closely monitored by the instructor and the guidance counselor. As assignments were completed, students moved up to the next lesson only if the lesson was completed satisfactorly. As students made progress, they were retested with either the Monroe/Sherman or instructor developed quizzes. As competence in each subject area demonstrably improved, students were retested with the official GED Practice Test Form BB. If the student achieved scores of 45+ in each subject area, they were encouraged to register for the next monthly GED examination. If less than a 45+ average was achieved, the student continued class work.

The guidance aspect of the program was involved with keeping student attendance high and checking incoming unofficial GED test scores for possible new students. As soon as the previous months test score were available, letters were sent to each student who failed and yet scored 210 points overall.

OUTCOMES

The main objective of the program was to enroll a minimum of sixty students and through structured instruction and guidance allow/enable forty-five students to earn their GED. In actuality 42 students enrolled in the program. Twenty students retested with eleven actually achieving their GED's.

The classroom aspect of the program (intensive individual study) worked very well. Those students who maintained a high level of attendance did well in classroom testing situations. Also, the educational materials compiled for the program met or exceeded our requirements. If there was an instructional problem, it was due to the unfamiliarity of such a structured program. However, the problems that caused the most difficulties were outside the classroom.

One of the most difficult problems that seems to be common to Adult Basic Education is student retention. For us this was no exception. One component of the program was to get each student to articulate their goals. It was felt that this would be a factor in retaining students and give them incentive to finish. This was accomplished. The instructor reasoned that because these people were so close to passing the exam that motivation would not be the same problem as with the general adult education student body. This was not true. The people in the GEDISG enrolled with the best intensions of following the program. Even with ongoing contact with

individual students, attendance would drop. Only those students who maintained a high level of attendance advanced. In spite of our efforts to maintain student population through intensive guidance, attendance dropped. The conclusions we drew from this experience is that (a) not enough is known about addressing the daily problems the average adult (once failed) student faces, and (b) we aren't able to acquire the resources to successfully address them.

Students who completed the program were encouraged to apply for post GED Vocational programs. Of the eleven students who passed, we are able to track five. One has applied and been accepted to Behrend, two are involved with local vocational education programs sponsored by J.T.P.A. It is felt that the others are seeking employment opportunities.

SUMMATIVE EVALUATION

Basically the GEDISG consisted of selecting eligable students, coaching them in (usually) two subject areas, monitoring their progress by test and retest, provide guidance and encouragement (maintain close contact with each student), and then have them retake the GED examination. This was done with the idea of meeting the eight stated objectives per program perposal. Of the eight objectives, six were met and two were partially met.

The objectives met were the actual mechanics of the program (objectives #1,2,3,4,7, and 8). The difficulty came in the variable (Specifically objectives #5 and #6) program component. This had to do with the number of students enrolled and passing the examination on retest.

The target enrollment was 60 students; we enrolled 42. The projected graduation figure was 45 students; 20 retested with 11 graduating. All 20 students were retested with the Official GED Practice Test, form BB and all scored higher than 225 points overall. No one was recommended for retesting unless 225+ points were achieved. Assuming that the official practice test is a valid indicator of how well a student will do, other factors must be considered (what exactly these factors are is what should be given further study).

In attempting to meet our target enrollment of 75 students we actually went back further in time than the 1988 school year. We in fact gathered scores from five years of GED test results. In all, over 300 prospective students were contacted. This is inclusive of names taken from each months unofficial GED scores as they became available to us. Also, telephone contact was attemped if a telephone number was available. This was very time consuming as our central file is kept on seperate index cards and had to be accessed by hand. Also, each month's test scores were often delayed. Usually they were received 6 to 8 weeks after a student was tested.

As of June, 1990, we are contacting those people who failed March's GED examination within our scoring guidelines (10 clients). We have students taking the GED examination in June and their results will not be readily available. It is felt by the program developer that the enrollment target was too optimistic and that enrollment targets were not achieved.

However, the program should be viewed summatively. Through our program 40 people who otherwise may have been lost to Adult Education were brought back. Of these at least 11 students have graduated and may now avail themselves of opportunities that demand a high school diploma. It is my opinion that students developed a sense of class envolvement and interacted with, and motivated, each other. Through the guidance component, all students expressed interest in post GED

educational opportunities, even those who did not continue in the program. Perhaps people who were contacted or dropped out will someday try again.

It is hoped by this adult educator that those who plan a program such as this be aware of the high numbers of prospective clients that must be contacted in order to enroll enough students to make such a program viable and that retaining these students is difficult at best. All one can really do is nurture their inner desire to succeed and leave the education window open for them.

APPENDIX A

Course materials selected for this 353 Special Project were:

Steck Vaugn Math Skill Series; #5500, #6600, #7700, and #8800,
Staff Developed Materials.

Social Studies

GED Social Studies Test; Cambridge (Prentice-Hall) Adult Education,
New Edition, (1989).
Staff Developed Materials.

Science

GED, Science Test; Cambridge (Prentice-Hall) Adult Education,
New Edition, (1989).
Exercise Book for GED Science Test, Cambridge (Prentice-Hall), New
Edition.
Staff Developed Materials.

Arts/Literature

Interpreting Literature and the Arts Test, Cambridge (Prentice-Hall)
Adult Education, New Edition (1989).
Exercise Book for Interpreting the Arts Test, Cambridge (Prentice-Hall),
New Edition (1989).
Staff Developed Materials.

Writing Skills/English

GED Exercise Book # 1; Steck-Vaugn, GED Series
Steck-Vaughn Language Skill Book Series; #610, #720, #830, and #940.

Testing Instruments/Materials

1. Monroe/Sherman Diagnostic Test (Partial).

2. Contemporary's Diagnostic Pre-Test For GED Instruction.

3. Tests of General Educational Development Official Practice Tests,
   Forms AA and BB.

4. Staff Developed Materials.

APPENDIX B

This Special 353 Project was developed to meet the needs of students who were very close to passing the G.E.D. examination. As with any new project we were subjected to growing pains and the necessity to deal with them. We also had to address problems that we didn't allow for, especially in the areas of support services. If any one impliments a program such as this and you need any assistance, or have any criticism or amplifications which may be helpful, please contact Gary D. Narbut, Adult Learning Center, 3325 Cherry Street, Erie, PA 16508

APPENDIX C

I would like to thank the entire staff of the Adult Learning Center for their help in developing and delivering this Special Project. I would especially note the assistance of our guidance counselor, Ms. Suzanne Jarrett, aide Molly Schillinger, secretary Marion Millimaci, and Mr. Daniel G. Tempestini, Director.